Part of the Solution: Gender-Integrated Sexual Assault Support Groups

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Welcome & Housekeeping

- Take care of yourself
- Today’s workshop is interactive
- Participation is TOTALLY optional

Green Sign-In Sheets

If you desire a copy of this PowerPoint and/or want to be on FORGE’s mailing list, this circulating sign-in sheet is the key to your dreams.
Who is FORGE?

25%

Direct service / TTA

75%

Two Foundational Principles

1. Trauma-Informed

2. Empowerment-based

Who has facilitated all-gender groups?

What are the concerns?

But We've Never Done It That Way Before!!!
### Agenda

- Introductions
- Concerns and benefits (brainstorm)
  - About the project
  - Benefits of gender-integrated groups
  - Assumptions vs. experiences
  - Techniques for building community
  - Addressing differences
- Q&A

### Project Structure

- Online survey of facilitators
  - N=97
  - Experience
  - Concerns
- In-depth interviews of experienced facilitators (volunteers)
  - N=18

### What are the benefits?

**BENEFITS**

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July 10, 2019

Benefits of group support

- Group support can/does...
  - Decrease PTSD symptoms & duration
  - Develop skills for healing
  - Provide community and connection with other survivors
  - Dispel myths
  - Reduce isolation
  - Validate experience and healing

Benefits of Gender-Integrated Groups

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Products

- Written guide
- Training webinars & workshops
Why it’s critical to move...

towards creating and facilitating all-gender groups

- All survivors deserve access to group support
- Stigma reduces = more male survivors seek services
- Cultural competency increases = more trans survivors seek services
- Non-binary population is growing
- Non-discrimination provisions (ex: VAWA)

5 Assumptions vs. Experiences
Assumption:

1. Women will feel unsafe around men

Experience

- Not all perpetrators are male
- Highly beneficial for those with male offenders to experience that not all men are dangerous
- Stress the commonality of survivorship (creates safety)

QUOTE

“Survivors can be hesitant to engage in a group that includes members of the gender that hurt them, but we have discussed that as an opportunity to communicate about concerns and boundaries, and rebuild trust with others.”
**Assumption:**

2. Groups need male & female co-facilitators

**Experience:**

- There are more than 2 genders!

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**QUOTE**

"[If you feel like your facilitators need to represent every single identity of your group members, then you're going to need as many facilitators as you have group members, and probably more, because there's not going to be a complete representation, and because I believe that there are infinite gender identities."

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**Assumption:**

3. Facilitators need cultural competency training

**Experience:**

- Need cultural competency in many areas:
  - Gender, Sexual Orientation, Age, Race, Disability, Religion....
  - Address your own biases before facilitating
  - More important: (active) listening training
“...Facilitators have to be open, humble, and well-versed in issues that may come up, and well-versed in people that don’t identify in the same way that they do.”

Assumption:

4. People won't talk in front of people of other genders

Experience

- People talk with people of other genders every day!
- Building trust is essential to allow deeper and healing interactions
  - Hint: This isn’t about gender, but about anything that people perceive to be different about each other

“I found that as long as there’s that connection (between group members) and people feel that others care, that [not sharing across genders] doesn’t happen. They’ll share....Once they felt that they were heard and that there wouldn’t be judgment, they were inclined to share.”
Assumption:

5. There needs to be more than one of each identity in a group

Experience

- People have 1,000s of identities
- No group can have another person that has their exact identity
- Contrast can sharpen how people see they are alike

QUOTE

“A transgender kid...spent a lot of time when they first joined the group trying to convince everybody that nobody understood them. And just sitting down and listening to the stories that other people in the group were telling, they finally looked at me one day and was like, ‘We really are all the same!’ They finally clicked. It wasn’t about gender.”
Techniques for Building Community

Community Agreements

Give group responsibility (1 of 2)

“I like for everyone in my group to know that we’re responsible for ourselves and to each other for how this [group] is going to turn out. I always tell them, ‘I’ve never done this before.’ They look at me like, oh god, this grown-up has never done this before! ..."

Give group responsibility (2 of 2)

“...No, I’ve led a million groups, but not with you and you and you today, with what’s happening in the world today. You know, every day is new. Every group is new. You might be feeling this way this week, and next week you’re going to feel a different way. And that’s OK. That’s kind of my take on connecting people and creating safety and building trust.”
“We talk about the central values, like an anti-oppression framework and creating an inclusive space for everybody. Then we talk about how that happens. I offer some ideas, but often the group members contribute ideas as well.”

“Whenever a new session would start, we would talk about making it a safe place and respecting other people’s experiences. So what does it look like when we respect other people’s experiences? What does it sound like? Part of that is pointing out to be really mindful of the language we’re using.”

“When we start the group and do introductions, we ask people to identify their pronoun. If there are questions, we explain a bit more about why we do that but don’t make a big deal about it. We now also ask people to put their pronouns on their nametag but some choose not to and we don’t pressure about that. It all seems a bit strange at first but people are getting used to it.”
Point out commonalities

“If somebody had shared a story, and then later in the group somebody else shared a story that had a parallel... As long as I felt like I knew that people would be comfortable, then I might point out the connections. ‘Oh, that’s like what this person was saying earlier.’ Or, ‘I wonder if that’s similar to what this person expressed or was feeling when they talked about their situation.’”

Addressing Differences

Two philosophical approaches and a smattering of techniques
1. Normalize learning

“We start with normalizing and not stigmatizing the process of what happens anytime you learn something new so that people feel comfortable with that. One of the things we talk a lot about was how our brains are neurologically wired for comfort....

1. Normalize learning

“...As humans, we tend to be creatures of comfort. So anytime something is new, it's totally understandable and normal that you may have some apprehension about it, or some anxiety. Then we talk about 'How do you make something not brand-new and foreign?'”

2. Reject binary thinking

“We do a lot of the work on spectrum rather than category. So whether that's talking about safety or even talking about issues related to domestic violence, to not say, 'Here is abusive and here is not abusive, healthy or unhealthy, safe and unsafe....’”
2. Reject binary thinking  (2 of 3)

“...Instead, we present a whole spectrum of what is most safe and what is least safe, along with the idea that things might fall differently in there. We could also do that about respect. We could do that about gender. We could do that with fill-in-the-blank....

2. Reject binary thinking  (3 of 3)

“...Having that framework everywhere makes it easier when you have the issues that we traditionally need it most for. It's not a novel idea when we're going to talk about being more open-minded or breaking a box about somebody's identity or gender or sexual orientation, because we've gotten away from boxes from the beginning.”

Other techniques  (1 of 2)

- Offer/solicit counter examples
- Facilitator confront/correct
- Allow members to handle
- Ask members to handle: “Here’s what’s happening; what do you want to do now?”
Other techniques (2 of 2)

- Shift focus/redirect
- Meet privately
- Ask, “What would help you be more comfortable?”
- Let member educate

What “junk” are you talking about? (1 of 2)

“One time a transgender trans guy, so female-to-male, was talking about his assaults. He was talking about how his assailant kept grabbing what he was calling his junk. And this cisgender male who was in the group kind of had this look on his face....”

What “junk” are you talking about? (2 of 2)

“...And so the person who was talking said, ‘You know, hey, my junk might not look like your junk, but it’s still my junk.’ But I think he was kind of just open to the quick little piece of education. And then they just moved on.”
Small group directions

1. Form groups of 4-5
2. Read scenario (all are different)
3. Brainstorm at least 5 possible responses (by facilitator or otherwise)
4. Identify pros/cons of each response
5. Choose and practice (role-play) one response (can be elaborate or simple)
6. If desired, modify and practice again

Large group discussion

Sorry, Teacher, but where do the kids whose most salient identity isn’t gender and instead self-identify as “awesome” line up?
If time...

- When discussing the scenarios, did people generate some proactive/preventative ideas?

Last Words

““All-gender groups create wider understanding that this violence can happen to anyone/everyone and we all need a place to get and give support. I think people feel stronger knowing they can show up for people different from themselves. It humanizes the experience.”

Last words

“This group has been, by far, one of the highlights of my role, my advocacy experience. I love, love facilitating this group.”
www.forge-forward.org

Social Media  #TransSurvivors

FORGE.trans  @FORGEforward  @FORGE_forward

Thank you!

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What we can offer you

- Training and technical assistance
  - 1-on-1 support
  - Webinars
  - Training
  - Publications

- Support for transgender survivors
  - Listservs
  - Referrals
  - Espavo Project
  - Publications

More details to come !!!

“Part of the Solution: Gender-Integrated Sexual Assault Support Groups”

Guide

July 2017

Webinar

July 20, 2017

Listserv

July 2017